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ABSTRACT

The analysis of story recall, a device used widely in reading research to gauge comprehension, typically involves a process of mapping recall against the original story. The process is based on the assumption that subjects are aiming for verbatim recall. To test the validity of this assumption, an analysis was conducted of 20 narrative retellings, 10 for each of two stories, presented by a sample of sixth grade students. The analysis supported the theory that a retelling of a story is not an attempt at verbatim recall, but rather an attempt to communicate an understanding of a story by selecting, organizing, and emphasizing certain events from that story while ignoring others. The findings suggest that mapping story recall against the original story may be an inappropriate analytic strategy for reading researchers. (FL)

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THE STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVE RETELLING

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THE STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVE RETELLING

One basic function of language is the communication of experience. We establish a link to the people around us by sharing and evaluating the events of our lives. As Nancy Martin writes:

> Personal "stories" are in fact the basic fabric of children's conversations, the means by which they enter into other people's experiences, try them on for fit and advance into general ideas. It would seem likely that adults also do this, that we collectively through anecdotes, build up a shared representation of life. (1976, p. 43)

James Britton suggests that narrative primarily develops as a social activity, as one of the ways people communicate with one another (1970, p. 71). Narrative can also function as one of the ways of understanding experience. We tell people about the events of our lives not only to share, delight or bemoan experiences, but also to try to comprehend them through language. To put a sequence of events into words is to come to some sort of an understanding of them. It is language used in the role of spectator (Britton, 1970), language used not to get something or achieve some goal, but rather used to evaluate and interpret experience. It is the language of gossip and monologues, the stories told at the end of the day with feet propped up and a drink in hand.

Just as we are narrative producing, we are also narrative consuming. We talk to one another about books, television shows, movies, the ballet in the same ways that we talk about our own experiences. You see a new movie. It was good. It made you think. So you tell someone about it. Just as we use narrative to share and to interpret experience, we also retell narratives we have read or seen or heard to share and to interpret them.

A narrative of personal experience is a mapping of events, of experiences, of memories of real world happenings on to a sequence of clauses. A narrative

cannot represent the events of real life exactly, of course. It cannot include everything that happened or all of the remembered or unremembered details. There is a necessary process of selection at work. Narrators select a sequence of significant events to include in a particular story, as a representation of a particular experience. Seymour Chatman (1975) argues that:

> . . . a narrative--any narrative, regardless of the style--is always a finite choice, represented by a limited number of discrete statements among a continuum of actions; no such choice can ever be totally complete, since the number of possible statements of the large actions is infinite . . . The author selects those events which he feels are sufficient to elicit in the mind of his audience this continuum. (p. 305)

If the original narrative is not an exact representation of reality but a selected version, controlled and interpreted by the narrator, then in a retelling, a further process of selection takes place, as the reteller must select from the limited store of events in the original story to retell the story to others.

Retellings of narratives have been widely used in research to gather data about reading comprehension and about story recall (Goodman, K. and Burke, 1973, Goodman, Y. 1971, Stein and Glenn, 1979, Thorndike, 1977, Mandler and Johnson, 1977, and Bower, 1976, among others). In these different studies, retellings are mapped against the original story using a story outline (Goodman and Burke, 1973), propositional analysis (Thorndike, 1977), or some other analytic system. These approaches to the analysis of narrative retelling must assume that there is no process of selection in the creation of a narrative retelling comparable to the process described by Chatman. The mapping of the content of a narrative retelling against the content of the original story

equates comprehension of a story with recall of that story, the more of the origiral story that is recalled in the retelling, the better the comprehension. Ideal comprehension, then, would be complete or perfect recall of the original story, and there can be no process of selection if the entire story is recalled.

Thorndike (1977), for example, examined the effect of plot structure on recall of prose by preparing four versions of a single story, each with different amounts of narrative structure as defined by a story grammar (p. 83). There was a version with normal story structure, one with the theme statement moved from the beginning to the end of the story and theme-directing plot structure removed, one with the theme statement removed entirely, and a descriptive version with all temporal sequencing removed. Thorndike had subjects either read or listen to one version of the story and then "to write the passage as close to verbatim as possible, exactly as it appeared in wording and sentence order" (p. 86). Thorndike then segmented the original stories and the retellings into propositions, clauses or sentences which contained action or stative verbs (p. 87). Retellings were scored for the number of propositions from the original story that were included. Thorndike found that the greater the amount of narrative structure in the original story, the greater the number of propositions recalled in the retelling (p. 88). The existence of identifiable organizational structure was found to be a significant factor for memory of narrative discourse (p. 95). Thorndike assumes that the subjects were attempting verbatim recall as instructed. If they were not, if for example, these subjects were selecting from the events in the original story to choose those events which they felt communicated the point of the story, then the existence of identifiable organizational structure may have affected how these stories were understood rather than how much of the stories were remembered.

Retellings have also been studied by the sociolinguist William Labov. Labov and his associates have been eliciting narratives from subjects in order to collect extended samples of relatively unmonitored speech. Labov has collaborated with several people to develop a distinct sociolinguistic, speech act-based theory of narrative (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, Labov, 1972, Labov and Fanshel, 1977).

Labov defines narrative as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (1972, p. 359). While some narratives may consist of a simple sequence of narrative clauses, the oral narratives which Labov collected were typically more developed, having some or all of the following components: an abstract that encapsulates the point of the story, an orientation which may introduce the time, the setting, the main character(s) and the situation, a series of complicating actions, an evaluative section where the point of the story is communicated, a series of resolving actions, and a coda which signals that the narrative is finished (p. 365). It is the notion of evaluation that distinguishes Labov's theory from other linguistically-based analyses of narrative. Evaluation can be thought of most broadly as all of the various ways narrators communicate the point of their story to an audience. Narrators evaluate stories to ward off the withering question "So what? Let me tell you what happened to me!" by showing that the events of a story are worth reporting (p. 366). Evaluation can be anything which stands out in a story from an explicit statement about the point of the story to a subtle transformation of narrative syntax which highlights certain events, pointing to them as more important, more central than others.

Labov and his associates have also asked informants to give an account of a favorite television show or a recently seen cartoon. These "narratives

of vicarious experience" as he has called them were typically like this retelling of an episode of "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." by a preadolescent Harlem youth:

> This kid--Napoleon got shot
> and he had to go on a mission.
> And so this kid, he went with Solo.
> So they went
> and this guy--they went through this window,
> and they caught him.
> And then he beat up them other people.
> And they went
> and then he said
> that this old lady was his mother
> and then he--and at the end he say
> that he was that guy's friend.[1] (1972a, p. 367)

Labov suggests that the meaningless and disoriented effect of this retelling, the sense of not knowing what is going on or why it is going on is because "none of the remarkable events that occur is evaluated" (p. 367). In this retelling, there is no sense that any of these events is more important than any other event, and there is no sense of what the point of the retelling is. Most of the retellings that Labov has collected are unevaluated narratives like the one just quoted, lacking a sense of what the significant events of the story are and what the point of the story is (p. 367).

Evaluation is one of the ways the selection process functions in narrative. Narrators select certain events in the story which they perceive as central to the point of the story and then emphasize those events by various transformations of narrative syntax to communicate that point to others. By suggesting that retellings are typically unevaluated, Labov is suggesting

that there is no selection process in retelling, that when retelling, the narrator is trying to recall all the events he/she can remember from a story.

Labov has made a claim about the typical structure of narrative retellings. It can be confirmed or disconfirmed empirically by examining the structure of other narrative retellings. If a significant number of other retellings are pointless, disorganized, unevaluated narratives, it would support the notion that retelling is a form of unstructured recall. If, however, retellings are typically evaluated stories, then it would suggest that in fact a process of selection does take place at least in some instances during narrative retelling.

The retellings examined here were collected as part of the evaluation materials for a curriculum development project completed by the English Department at Michigan State University with a school district in southwestern Michigan. The subjects were all white, sixth grade students from a semi-rural environment. Fifty students were identified randomly and given a Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) at the beginning of the school year and again at the conclusion of the year. Two stories were used, "The Runaway" by Warren J. Halliburton and "The Parsley Garden;" both are stories about young boys in trouble who are struggling to find a role for themselves in society. The stories were extensively edited and rewritten so that they were the same length with a similar narrative structure and a similar readability.

The procedures used for data collection would appear to have discouraged evaluated retellings. The students were lead out of their classroom by a stranger, taken to a small room and asked to read a story out loud after which they were to tell the researcher everything they could remember about the story. In everyday conversation, narratives are told for a variety of reasons: to make a point, to communicate an experience to others, to entertain, etc. These eleven and twelve year olds, however, were to retell a

story to a researcher who had just listened to them read it orally. They could not inform the researcher about the story; they could not reasonably expect to entertain the researcher; nor did they have to demonstrate that the story was in any way worth retelling. All they had to do was tell the researcher everything they could remember.

In preparing this analysis, a random sample of twenty retellings, ten of "The Runaway" and ten of "The Parsley Garden" was drawn from the larger sample. The analysis of these retellings is in three parts. First the various syntactic features of narrative which Labov has called "syntactic evaluative devices" are inventoried. These devices can be identified grammatically without reference to the structure of the retelling. Next the narrative structures found in these retellings are examined. Finally, the evaluation sections of the ten retellings of "The Parsley Garden" are isolated to determine what if any points these students are making in their retellings.

Syntactic Evaluative Devices

Labov has argued that narrative syntax is relatively simple; he suggests that a narrative clause can be described by an eight slot structure (1972, p. 376). Any transformation of or addition to that structure is unusual; hence it carries evaluative force (p. 378). Labov has classified the ways narrators manipulate narrative syntax into four major categories: intensifiers, comparators, correlatives, and explicatives. Table 1 summarizes the evaluative devices from these categories which were found in the ten retellings of "The Runaway" and in the ten retellings of "The Parsley Garden."

Insert Table 1 about here.

Intensifiers are the simplest and most straightforward evaluative device. They do not significantly alter narrative syntax, but select a particular

event and intensify it. Examples of intensifiers in the retellings include instances of expressive phonology: "Al said, 'No-o-o'" (said with a suggestion of insolence); quantifiers: "He didn't want the job at all"; lexical items: "Charlie told Larry, 'Chicken'"; repetition: "(the policeman) out of curiosity said, 'Halt! Halt!'"; and wh-exclamations: "He yelled, 'Hey!'"

Comparators evaluate the events of a narrative by comparing events which actually happened to events which did not happen or events which could have happened or might happen. Comparators are the most frequently used device in this sample. There are examples of imperatives: "And he said, 'Look! Don't turn me in to the police'"; questions: "And then Mr. Clemmer said, 'Why did you steal it?'"; negatives: "And he didn't get to dance with her anymore"; futures: "That he was going to take him to the police"; quasimodals: "She had to get up early the next morning"; and or-clauses: "And they'd pay him a dollar a day if he did that."

Correlatives evaluate events by bringing together two or more events which could have happened sequentially so that they are understood as happening simultaneously. The evaluative force of correlatives lies in the suspension of action; the forward movement of the narrative is suspended while simultaneous events are reported. Most of the correlatives found in the retellings are past progressives (be...-ing): "Then Roger was smiling at Larry," although there are also examples of double past progressives (double...-ing): "And she seen Al working out in the back in the parsley garden, working on a bench," and right embedded participles: "And he saw people nailing boxes together."

Explicatives evaluate events with various subordinate clauses which either qualify one event with another using conjunctions such as "when" or "while" or which explain an event by referring to another or to a state of being using conjunctions such as since or because. In the retellings, simple qualifications: "So . . . when his mother went to bed, he just sat there"

and simple causations: "And he said no because he hated them both" are the most frequently used.

In addition to the devices found in retellings, other devices--left branching participles, nominalizations, and compound causations--appeared in the original stories but not in the retellings. Conversely, external evaluation (the subject making an evaluative comment about the story such as "and that's why he was humiliated"), expressive phonology, repetition, and double appositives appear in the retellings but are not found in the original stories. These sixth graders use a full range of syntactic evaluative devices in their retellings, but they also use devices which were not used in the original story while not using other devices which did appear in the original stories.

Narrative Structure in Retellings

In the one hundred retellings reviewed for this paper there were three examples of narratives which were similar to the retelling of an episode of "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." quoted earlier, stories without orientations or codas that jump right into the middle of the action with a confused and disorienting list of unevaluated events:

> Ran away with some friends
> and they hurt the man in the store . . .
> and a . . . police caught him . . .
> (Cathy, "The Runaway")

> He stole a hammer.
> His mother had a garden.
> He made a bench.
> The manager of the--the managerof the store was Mr. Clemmer.
> He offered the boy a job.

I can't think of anything.

(Dave, "The Parsley Garden")

Al's mom had gone.
And Al stole a hammer
and got caught.
And he bought the h . . . his mom bought the hammer
and he made a little bench.

(Rita, "The Parsley Garden")

None of the events in these three retellings are evaluated. There is none of the complexity of syntax, the modals, negatives or intensifiers found in narratives of personal experience. The action is unclear, the references often confused. These are vicarious narratives as Labov discusses them.

It is remarkable, however, how few retellings are actually like Labov's retellings. Even the most minimal retellings normally take the form of complicating action, evaluation, and resolving action:

C ┌ These boys went in a store
  └ and they got in a fight.

E — The cops were after them so they got in a ferry boat.

R ┌ And they took off
  │ and the cops caught Roger
  └ And took him some place.

(Tim, "The Runaway")

The first two clauses of Tim's retelling form the complicating action of his narrative. The third clause is the evaluation of the narrative. It suspends the action by explaining why the boys were on the ferry and separates the complicating action from the resolving action. The fourth, fifth, and sixth

clauses are the resolution of the narrative. The boys take off, and the police catch Roger. Tim's retelling loses most of the detail of the original story; it is a summary, almost an abstract. It is difficult to tell what Tim feels is the point of the story other than that the boys were being chased by the police. Still, Tim's retelling is a fully-formed narrative. There is complicating action, evaluation which suspends the action and separates complication from resolution, and there is resolving action. Few of the retellings are as simple as Tim's. Many are complex and skillfully structured, utilizing a variety of evaluative devices and embedded narratives to create sophisticated stories. Most, however, fall between these extremes. They have a clear narrative structure, which simplifies the original story but which also uses a limited range of evaluative devices to communicate a clear point about that story.

The narrative structure of the retellings will be examined in two parts: first the transitional components, abstracts, orientations, and codas which are all optional, and then the cycle of complicating action, evaluation, and resolving action which must appear if a narrative is to be fully-formed in Labov's sense.

Abstracts, Orientations, and Codas in Narrative Retellings

Abstracts, orientations, and codas can be seen as transitional components in narrative. They function primarily to establish and to maintain the channel of communication between a speaker and a listener. The abstract orients the listener to the fact that a narrative is about to begin by encapsulating the point of the story; the orientation establishes the time, place, characters and setting; and the coda signals that the narrative is finished.

Table 2 summarizes the orientations and codas found in the twenty retellings examined earlier.

Insert Table 2 about here.

All twenty retellings have either an orientation, a coda, or both. Some transitional components are quite simple:

There were these three boys
and they weren't very good.

(Orientation used by Leslie, "The Runaway")

That's all I remember.

(Coda used by a number of subjects)

Other orientations and codas are complex character sketches or poignant final images of a boy finding himself in a difficult world:

This boy Al--they had a parsley garden
and one day he was sitting by the garden
he was eating parsley
and he wanted,
if he had time, he wanted to make something out of some old
box wood and with his nails
but he didn't have a hammer
and somehow he wanted to get the hammer.

(Orientation used by Leslie, "The Parsley Garden")

And Al sat outside, sitting on the bench that he made with
the hammer and nails and that box that he got.

(Coda used by Don, "The Parsley Garden")

Orientations and codas are optional features of narrative. Even when they do not occur, listeners understand that an utterance is a narrative. Orientations and codas are, however, typical features of narratives. From an early age we hear stories that open with 'Once upon a time' and that close

with "The end." These sixth graders knew how narratives are supposed to begin and end, and this knowledge is reflected in their retellings.

Complication, Evaluation and Resolution in Narrative Retellings

While most retellings have either an orientation, a coda or both, all of the retellings examined (except for those quoted earlier which are completely devoid of evaluation and evaluative devices) have a sequence of complicating action, evaluation and resolving action. It is possible to find unevaluated retellings. It does not seem possible to find retellings where evaluation appears randomly or unsystematically. Evaluative devices may appear in a variety of positions in a narrative, in the abstract, orientation or coda, in the evaluation section of embedded narratives, even in the action near the central evaluation of the story. But regardless of where else it appears, evaluation and evaluative devices always separate the complicating action from the resolving action. If narrative retelling was a form of unstructured recall, then at least some subjects would include the orientation of a story, or the coda of a story in their retelling while retelling the body of the story as a series of unevaluated events, but it never happens. Evaluation, when it appears, is always systematic.

Louise's retelling of "The Parsley Garden" is a representative retelling. It is not as simple as Tim's or as complex as others. There is a single cycle of complicating action, evaluation, and resolving action, and no embedded narratives. Louise begins her retelling with an orientation in the first two clauses. The orientation introduces the main character (A1) and the behavioral situation, (he wanted a hammer).

O
1 Okay, Al stole a . . . or he didn't have any money to . . .
2 and he wanted a hammer.

C
3 So he went to the store
4 and he took the hammer.
5 And then a guy caught him
6 and he turned him into the manager.

E
7 And the manager was going to turn him over to the police.
8 And . . . they, guy . . . or, Mr. . . . Okay, and then they were going to turn him over to the police
9 and he didn't want them to.

R
10 And he worked for an hour
11 and they gave him the hammer.
12 But he kept on working.
13 And they wanted him to stay for the job.

c
14 But he didn't. He didn't cause he hated them both.

(Louise, "The Parsley Garden")

There is one evaluative device, a negative: "Al didn't have any money." Louise tries to begin her story with action, with Al stealing the hammer, but she realizes that this action can be misinterpreted so she interrupts herself to explain why Al stole the hammer, because he didn't have any money. Being poor though, does not justify stealing a hammer so she interrupts herself again to explain that he wanted a hammer. The point that Louise is making here is that Al had a reason for taking the hammer. Al wasn't a shiftless juvenile delinquent; he wasn't stealing for a thrill or because he was bored. He needed a hammer and being poor, stealing was the only way he could get it. Al had a reasonable need for the hammer, and reasonable needs should be met if possible.

The complicating action of Louise's narrative in clauses three through six focus on the stealing of the hammer. Al goes to the store, takes the hammer and gets caught. The evaluation section, in clauses seven through nine, is the confrontation between Al and the manager of the store after Al was caught. There are three evaluative devices: two past progressives and a negative. This scene is central to the story and appears in most of the retellings. All of the major themes of the story are found in the dialogue between Al and the manager, and the conflict of the story is established. Al wants to be a responsible person, but when he steals the hammer and is caught, he gives up any claim to that role as the manager demonstrates by systematically stripping Al of all his dignity:

> Al had stood there for fifteen minutes before the man looked at him again.
> "Well?"
> "I didn't mean to steal it. I just need it, and I haven't any money."
> "Just because you haven't got any money doesn't mean you've got a right to steal things does it?"
> "No, sir," Al replied.
> "Well, what am I going to do with you? Turn you over to the police?"
> Al didn't say anything, but he certainly didn't want to be turned over to the police.
> "If I let you go will you promise never to steal from this store again?"
> "Yes, sir."
> "All right." The man shrugged with resignation. "Go out this way and don't come back until you have some money to spend."
> ("The Parsley Garden")

The importance of this passage is reflected in the large number of evaluative devices that are used, twenty-seven in seventeen clauses, almost twice the average density of evaluation in the story. Louise eliminates almost all of

the detail from her retelling of the scene to focus on the fact that the man was thinking about turning Al over to the police, and Al doesn't want him to. Louise is presenting her major point here: stealing is wrong. If you steal you should be punished, sent to the police. The disorientation she has in the middle of the section "and . . . they, guy . . . or Mr. . . ." seems to be an attempt to include other material from the original scene, but she is unable to integrate this material with her major point so she drops it. When asked by the researchers why she thought the author wrote the story, Louise responded: "Um, you shouldn't, you shouldn't take stuff even though you don't have any money or whatever," echoing the two points she made in her evaluation and orientation, that stealing is wrong even when you have a reasonable need for a hammer but no money.

The resolving action of Louise's retelling in clauses ten through thirteen presents what happened after Al's confrontation with the manager. He goes back the next day and works at the store. After an hour, they give him the hammer, but he keeps on working. Then, at the end of the day, they try to give him a job which brings Louise to her coda in the final clause of the retelling:

> But he didn't (take the job). He didn't cause he hated them both.
>
> (Louise, "The Parsley Garden")

There are four evaluative devices here, two negatives, a causative and the repetition of the negatives which adds extra emphasis here rather than reorienting the narrative as it did in the evaluation section. In her coda, Louise presents her third point: Al wants to be a responsible person. Al is a youth struggling to find a place for himself in society. The men in the store, however, treat Al like an irresponsible child. They make him wait. They destroy his logic. But Al proves them wrong. He goes back, works all

day and then turns down their offer of a job, taking only a hammer. Children have very little control of their lives; they are dependent on others for food and shelter. One of the few ways Al can assert that he is a responsible person is by exercising freedom of choice, refusing to take something from people he doesn't like.

Louise's simple narrative may not be too clear. She is not a strong reader, and the evidence from the story to support the three points she makes is not presented with particular skill. Louise's retelling, however, is not an unevaluated list of events like the retelling of "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." quoted earlier. It is, rather, a fully formed narrative with all of the components you would expect to find in such a narrative.

The Points Made in Retellings of "The Parsley Garden"

The points which are made in narrative retellings can also be examined by isolating the evaluation sections of the retellings from the rest of the narratives. Of the ten retellings of "The Parsley Garden," seven, like Leslie's, have a single sequence of complicating action, evaluation, and resolving action. Three, however, have two independent sequences of complicating action, evaluation and resolving action. This means that there are thirteen evaluation sections in these retellings of "The Parsley Garden" where the students should be focusing on what they feel are the central events of the story to present what they feel is the point or points of the story they have just read. These sections have been extracted from the retellings for comparison:

> And he didn't have a good night because he was thinking about this.
>
> (Betty)

> Al was waiting there for a few minutes, 'til the manager said something, that he was going to take him to the police.
>
> But Al didn't say nuthin.
>
> (Billy)

The manager said, told him if he'd like him to call the police?
And Al didn't say anything.
Then the guy told him he would let him go.
(Don)

And she said, "I don't want you to steal anymore."
(Darrell)

And then Al had to wait for fifteen minutes.
And then the manager finally asked him if he was going to steal from the store any more.
Al said, "No-o-o."
***
And he didn't take it.
He didn't want it.
He didn't want a job there.
(Elliot)

But he didn't get much sleep that night because he was thinking about what happened.
(Leslie)

And the manager was going to turn him over to the police
and . . . the, guy . . . or, Mr. . . . Okay.
And then they were going to turn him over to the police
and he didn't want them to.
(Louise)

He didn't sleep much.
(Micky)

So she was going to give him some money to go back and buy it

but he didn't want to

***

but he didn't want to take the money because he didn't like the two men.

(Sally)

And he said, "Look! Don't turn me in to the police!"

***

And he didn't take it (the job).

(Terry)

Five of these evaluations are from the conversation between Al and the manager at the store. They make the point that stealing is wrong and that Al wants to be a responsible person. Three of the evaluations focus on the fact that Al didn't get much sleep that night, two on the conversation between Al and his mother, and three on Al's refusal of the job. Each of these makes the point in a different way that Al wants to be a responsible person. These thirteen evaluation sections represent only four different scenes from the original story and just two general points: Al wants to be a responsible person and stealing is wrong. In these retellings of "The Parsley Garden," a narrow range of events are selected for evaluation to put forward a small number of points. Retellers generally agree about the point or points a story makes. There is a good deal of variation, however, in the amount of evidence used to highlight and emphasize the evaluation sections.

Rosenblatt has argued that reading should be viewed as a transaction between a reader and a text (1979). Retellings come out of that transaction and both the text and the reader contribute. In the limited number of events that readers evaluate in their retellings, and in the limited number of points that they make in those evaluation sections, we see the contribution of the

text; in the range of detail and in the evaluative devices the retellers select to support those points and to evaluate those events, we see the contribution of the reader. In this sense, a retelling properly examined is a window into the transaction of reading.

Conclusion

Labov's observations about the nature of the retellings do not generalize to the retellings examined here. A retelling of a story is not an attempt at verbatim recall, rather it is an attempt to communicate an understanding of a story by selecting, organizing and emphasizing certain events from the story while ignoring others. This conclusion is supported by four observations about the retellings examined here:

1. These retellings contained a complete range of the syntactic evaluative devices that Labov has identified in narratives of personal experience.

2. These retellings had the same narrative structure that Labov has identified in narratives of personal experience.

3. The syntactic evaluative devices which appeared in retellings were sometimes in the orientation section, sometimes in the coda, and sometimes in embedded narratives, but they always appeared in the evaluation section of the narrative, separating the complicating action from the resolving action.

4. The evaluation section(s) of the retellings presented what these sixth grade students felt was the point (or points) of the story they had just read.

There is, of course, no way of knowing why Labov's subjects did not evaluate their retellings. It could be because the original narratives were

television shows or cartoons. It could also be due to a particular style of retelling used by black inner-city youth as suggested by Watson (1973). It is also possible, however, that the retellings Labov examined were unevaluated because his subjects did not perceive a point to the television show they had just watched (or perhaps because there was no point), and hence they had no point to communicate in their retelling. The pre-adolescents examined here from a semi-rural area in southwestern Michigan were reading stories about children approximately their own age who were experiencing common pre-adolescent problems: conflict with authority and the process of establishing oneself as an adult. Labov's subjects, on the other hand, were watching shows such as "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." which were probably very far from the interests and experiences of pre-adolescent Harlem youth. The pointlessness of their retellings may have reflected their understanding or lack of understanding of the original narratives more than anything else.

The process of selecting and evaluating events to show the point of a story functions in retellings in the same way that it functions in narratives of personal experience. The assumption underlying different analyses of retellings in studies of reading comprehension and story recall, that retellings are a form of unstructured recall, a process of trying to remember every detail possible from a story aiming at perfect recall cannot be supported. The real evidence of reading comprehension in a retelling lies not so much in what is recalled as in how it is recalled. It of course follows from this argument that the more complex our understanding of a story we've just read, the more complex the narrative will be that we create in retellings and the more narrative details there will be that can be included in the retelling. Thus story outlines and propositional analyses will provide indirect measures of comprehension. Yet no refinement of the method of mapping retellings against original stories can substantially alter its

ability to measure comprehension because it is measuring only the contribution of the text to the transaction of reading and not the contribution of the reader.

Significantly, other researchers have also made this point. Harste and Carey (1979) argue that a retelling is a result of a semantic transaction between the reader and the text and that what distinguishes retellings are not their similarities with the original texts but their enormous differences (p. 17). Smith (1979) has suggested that the analysis of retelling should focus on "the reader as author of his own version of the content (of a text)" (p. 90).

If the study of retellings is to contribute significantly to our understanding of how readers comprehend texts, then we must develop new ways of analyzing retellings which take into account both the reader's contribution and the contribution of the original text. We must be able to determine both what is remembered and how it is organized and presented. The approach taken here, of analyzing the evaluative components of a retelling offers a great deal of promise. Yet this is only one approach. Harste and Carey (1979) and Smith (1979) offer different approaches. There is no way to know at this point which will be the most productive. If, however, we continue to map events and characters found in those retellings against original stories without considering how those events and characters are structured in the retold narrative, we will continue to miss the most important insights retellings have to offer.

FOOTNOTES

The research reported here is drawn from my dissertation, The Evaluation of Narrative Retellings by Sixth Grade Students completed at Michigan State University under the direction of James Stalker in August 1980. I am indebted to Cindy Selfe for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of the paper.

[1] Retellings are presented here in a style developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967). Each independent clause along with any subordinate clauses is placed on a single line. In addition, conjoined verb phrases which are temporally ordered are also separated and placed on separate lines. A sentence such as "He ran and then walked and then crawled" has three sequential actions and would be treated as three narrative clauses. The narrative structure of the retellings is sketched to the left of the narrative in an informal tree structure. The labels in the structure are: O=orientation, C=complicating action, E=evaluation, R=resolving action, and c=coda.

TABLE 1

Evaluative devices in original stories and in retellings.

DEVICES	"The Runaway" Retellings T = 186	"The Parsley Garden" Retellings T = 280
Intensifiers:		
Gestures	0	0
Expressive Phonology	4	0
Quantifiers	15	18
Repetition	2	2
Ritual Utterances	0	0
Lexical Items	4	7
Foregrounding	1	0
Wh-Exclamations	1	1
TOTAL	27	33
Comparatives:		
Imperatives	3	3
Questions	2	14
Negatives	10	40
Futures	2	6
Modals	5	9
Quasimodals	0	6
Or-clauses	0	5
Comparators	1	0
TOTAL	23	73

TABLE 1 (cont.)

DEVICES	"The Runaway" Retellings T = 186	"The Parsley Garden" Retellings T = 280
Correlatives:		
Be...ing	18	8
Double...ing	1	3
Double Appositives	0	0
Double Attributives	0	1
Participle Right	1	6
Participle Left	0	0
Nominalizations	0	0
TOTAL	20	18
Explicatives:		
Simple Qualification	5	6
Simple Causation	6	12
Complex Qualification	0	1
Complex Causation	0	1
Compound Qualification	0	0
Compound Causation	0	0
TOTAL	11	20
TOTAL	81	154

TABLE 2

Orientations and codas found in the retellings

of "The Parsley Garden" and "The Runaway."

	"The Runaway"	"The Parsley Garden"
Retellings with orientations and codas	9	4
Retellings with an orientation but no coda	1	3
Retellings with no orientation but with a coda	0	3
Retellings with no orientation and no coda	0	0

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